United Nations A/CN.10/PV.344

General Assembly *Official Records*

Disarmament Commission
344th meeting
Monday, 6 April 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

Chair: Mr. Seck ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I declare open the 2015 substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC).

Before we take up the first order of the day, allow me, on behalf of all the members of the Commission, to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who I am sure will provide substantive support to the session of the Commission. Her presence here today underlines the importance of the UNDC in general and the high expectations of the member States of this session in particular.

Allow me to thank the outgoing Chair, Ambassador Drobnjak, Permanent Representative of Croatia, for the commendable, even outstanding, efforts he made during the last session to advance the Commission's work.

After several cycles of stalemates during which no recommendation was able to be made, our Commission, which plays a very important role in the process of developing and maintaining global disarmament standards, begins this year a new cycle, the first substantive stage of which begins today. As we know, the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime has for some years faced numerous obstacles that have considerably hampered any progress. In our view, the ongoing stalemate in the disarmament forums must lead to serious multilateral diplomatic efforts with a view to providing a collective and effective response to the security challenges that humankind faces. Unilateralism, bilateralism and plurilateralism can be good, but they are not a panacea for the international community to reach effective disarmament on conventional and nuclear weapons. We must therefore bear in mind that security is either comprehensive or it is not.

Underscoring the importance of last year's exchanges of views, it is my hope that the growing recognition of the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation issues will be conducive to the successful culmination of our session this year. We must take action to restore our Commission's credibility, as that is what is at stake. Consultations on this issue and others linked to improving the Commission's effectiveness will continue over the weeks to come.

Although progress on consensus recommendations depends on developments in the broader field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, I have the ultimate belief that our efforts will not be in vain and that the obstacles we face will be overcome. I trust that with the help of all in the next three weeks the United Nations Disarmament Commission will be able to provide guidance on the issues before it. Political will and the need to restore the credibility of the disarmament machinery will push us and help us get there, of that I am sure.

I now give the floor to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

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Ms. Kane (High Representative for Disarmament Affairs): It is an honour to once again address the Disarmament Commission as it opens its 2015 substantive session. I commend the departing Chairman, Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak, for his dedicated stewardship of the work of the Commission and I recognize with appreciation the many efforts of his Bureau, especially the Chairs of the two Working Groups, Ambassador Al-Sudairy and Mr. Langeland. I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Seck on his election as the Chair of the 2015 session. The Office of Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist the Chair, the Bureau and all delegations throughout this session.

One of my first statements as High Representative was to this body in 2012, at the commencement of the Commission's last cycle (A/CN.10/PV.319). I will be the first to admit that the intervening three years have not been the best of times for disarmament. The prospects for further nuclear arms reductions are dim, and we may even be witnessing a roll-back of the hard-won disarmament gains of the last 25 years. I have never seen a wider divide between nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots over the scale and pace of nuclear disarmament. This schism is reflected here in the Commission and continues to act as a significant brake on forward movement.

The Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is less than one month away, will need to find a way to bridge the fissure between those States parties that continue to support a step-by-step approach to disarmament and see the Action Plan agreed at the 2010 Review Conference as a long-term goal, and those States parties — the overwhelming majority, I might add — that do not view the Action Plan as an open-ended commitment, demanding concrete evidence that the binding commitments made under article VI of the Treaty are being fulfilled.

Turning to the issue of conventional weapons, we are flooded daily with images of the brutal and internecine regional conflicts bedevilling the globe — conflicts fuelled by unregulated and illegal arms flows. It is estimated that more than 740,000 men, women, and children die each year as a result of armed violence. However, in the midst of these dark clouds, I have seen some genuine bright spots during my tenure as High Representative. The bitter conflict in Syria will not, in the words of the Secretary-General, be brought to a close without an inclusive and Syrian-led political process, but Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, facilitated by the Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons agreed upon between the Russian Federation and the United States of America, has been one positive outcome from this bloody conflict. We have seen the complete removal of all declared chemicals from Syria and the commencement of a process to destroy all of Syria's chemical-weapons production facilities, although the so-called chlorine bombs remain a grave concern to the international community.

Emerging from the so-called disarmament malaise, the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament, supported by, again, a clear majority of States — as illustrated by the 155 States that supported New Zealand's statement in the First Committee — has continued to gather momentum. This is not a distraction from the so-called realist politics of nuclear disarmament. Rather, it is an approach that seeks to underscore the devastating human impact of nuclear weapons and to ground them in international humanitarian law. This movement is supported by almost 80 per cent of the States Members of the United Nations. These numbers cannot be ignored.

One of the international community's major achievements in the last year has been to bring the Arms Trade Treaty into force only a year and a half after it was negotiated. This truly historic treaty will play a critical role in ensuring that all actors involved in the arms trade must be held accountable and must be expected to comply with internationally agreed standards, for example, by ensuring that their arms exports are not going to be used to violate arms embargoes or to fuel conflict and by exercising better control over arms and ammunition imports in order to prevent diversion or retransfers to unauthorized users. To my mind, these achievements all highlight the possibility of achieving breakthroughs in disarmament and non-proliferation even in the most trying of international climates.

Today is the last time I will address this body, and it is with considerable regret that I must, once again, note the Commission's absence of consensus in pursuing its mandate. It is disheartening to see the Commission devolve into an annual procedural box-checking exercise. We are unfortunately witnessing a triumph of ritual over concrete results. But, to paraphrase Shakespeare's Mark Antony, I come neither to bury the Disarmament Commission nor to praise it, but to encourage it and to cajole it. The Commission

has an integral role to play in the United Nations disarmament machinery. Its development of guidelines and recommendations has the potential to inspire future General Assembly resolutions, while also preparing the ground for new multilateral treaties. Fulfilling this potential, however, will require the Commission to work actively to seek compromises that will expand our common ground.

It is worth recalling that between 1979 and 1999, the Commission was exceptionally active. It was able to adopt 16 guidelines, recommendations and declarations across a wide array of vital issues, many of them agreed upon during the height of Cold War tensions. If these results could be achieved during such difficult times, surely they can be achieved today. By adopting a new three-year cycle deliberative agenda, the Commission can collectively cast its vote for multilateralism, for disarmament as an essential means to strengthen international peace and security and for the United Nations as an indispensable common forum for the pursuit of common interests.

As recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/77, the Commission should direct its attention to more specific subjects, providing for focused deliberations and keeping in mind the proposal to include a third agenda item. Should the Commission decide to pursue this route there is an abundance of issues to choose from, including the reports of various groups of governmental experts on topics ranging from disarmament and development to outer space and the reduction of military budgets. Alternatively, the Commission could choose to tackle one of the emerging international security threats of the twenty-first century, prominent among which are cyberthreats and the evolving use of unmanned aerial vehicles.

The point I am trying to make is that in an ever more complicated international security environment, the Disarmament Commission, as a key component of the United Nations disarmament machinery, has an increasingly important function to deliberate and make recommendations that benefit our collective security. I welcome the Commission's efforts to consider how to enhance its efficiency and encourage it to seek new and innovative ideas.

However, procedural change without corresponding substantive achievement will mean little in the grander scheme of things. What is required is the political will of Member States to take us out of the current morass and produce tangible results capable of advancing the important disarmament issues of today. They may be rare, but I have seen real efforts towards compromise and cooperation during my time as High Representative. Each of these initiatives has resulted in the enhanced security of all States. While the chasm between positions can seem wide, it is really the Commission's duty to bridge it. It should make this its legacy. In the Office of Disarmament Affairs it has a ready and willing ally.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Kane for her statement.

Election of other officers

The Chair (*spoke in French*): As members will recall, the Commission has yet to elect Vice-Chairs and a Rapporteur from the regional groups.

I have been informed that consultations are still ongoing within the Group of African States, the Group of Asia and Pacific States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States on possible candidates for the posts of Vice-Chair, and we will therefore take up the election of Vice-Chairs from those groups at a later stage.

However, I am pleased to inform the Commission that the following endorsements have been received.

The Group of Eastern European States has endorsed Ms. Marija Perišić, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Serbia, for Vice-Chair, and Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Bulgaria, as Rapporteur from the Group of Eastern European States. The Group of Western European and Other States has endorsed Mr. Andrea Romussi, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Italy, and Mr. Manuel Frederico Pinheiro da Silva, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Portugal, as Vice-Chairs from the Group of Western European and Other States.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect Ms. Marija Perišić, Mr. Andrea Romussi, and Mr. Manuel Frederico Pinheiro da Silva as Vice-Chairs, and Ms. Lachezara Stoeva as the Rapporteur, of the Commission of the 2015 substantive session, by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Commission, I would like to warmly congratulate the

elected representatives and wish them every success in discharging their duties. I am sure that they will make an important contribution to the smooth work of the Commission this year. On a personal note, I know I will count on their support and counsel as a vital aspect of the work of the Bureau in this substantive session.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.